

# Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**April 25 - 26, 2000**



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**  
**NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE**

**Executive Summary**  
**Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics**  
**April 25-26, 2000**

Crowne Plaza Hotel  
Washington, D.C.

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## **Attendants at Meeting**

### **Members Present**

Charles E. Adams	Mary A. Pamplin (Chair)
Walter J. Armbruster	Bobby R. Phillips
Arthur R. Brown	Ross R. Racine
Robert D. Epperson	James D. Rieck
John I. Gifford	Gumecindo Salas
Carol A. Gregg	Lee F. Schrader
Mark W. Jenner	Topper Thorpe
Thomas H. Kimmell	Hugh A. Warren
Ling-Jung (Kelvin) Koong	Mark E. Whalon
Mark D. Lange	Ewen M. Wilson (Ex-Officio)
Andrew W. LaVigne	Ron C. Wimberley
Sheila K. Massey	Ivan W. Wyatt

### **Members Absent**

Jack C. Mitenbuler  
Edward J. Pennick

### **USDA Personnel Participating**

Miley Gonzalez, Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics  
Ron Bosecker, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)  
Rich Allen, Committee Executive Director and Associate Administrator, NASS  
Fred Vogel, Deputy Administrator for Programs and Products, NASS  
Joe Reilly, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, NASS  
Carol House, Director of Research and Development Division, NASS  
Jack Nealon, Director of Statistics Division, NASS  
Steve Wiyatt, Director of Census and Survey Division, NASS

### **Other Guests Present**

Kathleen Depukat, Environmental Protection Agency  
Francine Hardy, Statistics Canada  
Merritt Padgitt, Economic Research Service, USDA  
Kitty Smith, Economic Research Service, USDA  
David Salmonsens, American Farm Bureau Federation  
James Varnado, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, USDA  
Jim Zavrel, Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce

## **Other NASS Personnel Present**

Bill Arends  
Jim Brueggen  
Marshall Dantzler  
Esther Darnell  
Craig Flynn  
Janice Goodwin  
Kent Hoover  
Linda Hutton  
Chrissy Jenkins  
Brian Lounsbury  
Joe Miller  
Greg Preston  
Cathy Tomczak  
Arnie Wilcox  
Phil Zellers

## Day One Summary

Committee chair Ashby Pamplin opened the Advisory Committee meeting. Rich Allen discussed the meeting's focus and logistics. He then introduced Miley Gonzalez, Under Secretary for the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area of the USDA .

Under Secretary Gonzalez welcomed the Committee and recognized the wide agricultural representation of members on the Committee. He commented on the changing structure and role of the agriculture sector, its effect on urban areas, and the need for good agricultural statistics. He emphasized the importance of committee activities in helping the USDA develop sound policy for long range sustainability and stated that he looks forward to its advice.

Ron Bosecker provided introductory remarks. He described the key roles of the Advisory Committee, presented REE mission area goals, and discussed NASS core values. He will provide committee members with an updated NASS Strategic Plan and will ask for member comments.

Steve Wiyatt provided an overview of census of agriculture procedures including proposed time line, target dates, and general processing flow. He also presented census issues and concerns related to coordination of the census with ongoing surveys, computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), questionnaire scanning and character recognition, web based data collection, publication products, follow-on special studies, and censuses in outlying areas such as Puerto Rico.

Fred Vogel presented an overview of the census of agriculture content review which included comments on respondent burden, comparability with history, and concept changes involving the reporting unit for data items. The committee engaged in lengthy discussions on census content issues related to coverage, production expenses, value of sales, net returns, chemical usage, farm machinery and equipment, irrigation, production contracts, and operation characteristics and demographics.

Francine Hardy of Statistics Canada and Jim Zavrel from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) made brief statements during the public questions and comments period. Francine commented and answered questions on Statistics Canada's census procedures, coverage issues, procedures to collect demographic data, web based data collection activities, and CATI operations. Jim Zavrel provided an overview of the BEA program and stressed the importance of the census of agriculture to their work.

Carol House presented an overview of American Indian Census procedures. She provided some historical perspective, discussed current issues, and proposed options for 2002. These options included repeating 1997 procedures and a proposed budget initiative to improve Indian reservation data and produce a special publication. Committee discussions involved the historic treatment of reservations as a single farm, the independent and highly variable nature of Indian reservations, the impact of Indian agriculture on the farm sector as a whole, the need for improved data collection procedures, and the goal of better coverage.

## Day Two Summary

Ron Bosecker presented six NASS data use principals and led discussion of a draft policy and standards memorandum on access to unpublished data. The six data use principals include (1) names, addresses, and personal identifiers are never revealed nor kept with data; (2) NASS survey and census data never leave NASS facilities; (3) only authorized persons working for NASS as employees or sworn partners, who are subject to fines and imprisonment for unauthorized disclosure, can access NASS data and only for approved statistical purposes; (4) NASS does not conduct surveys or provide data for private, proprietary purposes; (5) when NASS collects data for others in a NASS approved statistical study, farmers and ranchers will always be informed about the cooperating sponsor and participation will always be voluntary; and (6) summary data from all NASS surveys and censuses are available to everyone, but will never disclose individual reported information. The committee discussed the concept of employees and sworn partners, what constitutes an approved statistical study, sponsored surveys, and public announcement of sponsored surveys and special data tabulations.

Comments were made on NASS Data Use/Access. The subcommittee expressed its appreciation for NASS's openness and acceptance of input and stated that it was comforting to know the number of NASS personnel involved in the process, but felt the ultimate responsibility is on the Administrator. There were additional comments noting that it was nice to know that the NASS data access firewall exists with a foundation in fair access. Regulatory realities make the use of NASS data crucial and legal realities create high standards for data access. There are two opposing perspectives which involve confidentiality, trust, and anonymity on one hand and the appropriate use of data on the other. There is a good double screen in NASS policy which includes (1) the swearing in of data users and statistical review prior to access, and (2) screening of all output.

Rich Allen provided an overview of mandatory business reporting issues including the advantages of voluntary reporting, reasons for non-reporting, current situation in NASS, 1995 Farm Bill proposal, and possible options. The committee discussed the pros and cons to mandatory business reporting, the effects of incomplete or inaccurate reporting on prices, and the potential need for auditing.

Ashby Pamplin called for new committee business which led to a discussion of creating an executive committee which could include past, present, and future committee chairs and two at-large members. There was concern that the rest of the committee would just become a rubber stamp for the executive committee and that the full committee may want to stick with forming ad hoc subcommittees to deal with specific issues. An executive committee was not formed.

The committee also discussed issues for the next meeting's agenda which included coverage of small farms, environmental statistics, and committee chair election. This was Ashby Pamplin's last meeting as chair, Topper Thorpe is the chair elect. The committee agreed to wait until next meeting to elect the chair to succeed Topper. A nominating committee was formed which included Art Brown, Hugh Warren, and Ron Wimberley.

Ashby Pamplin called on committee members for recommendations which follow. She raised questions on the role of the Advisory Committee and NASS's obligation to respond to committee recommendations.

## Committee Recommendations

The Advisory Committee made a number of recommendations which are listed below along with the name of the person making the motion and action taken.

- (1) **The Committee supports the draft Policy and Standards Memorandum 7, Access to Unpublished Data, as distributed for this meeting.** (Mark Jenner)

Action: Passed. It was noted that some cleaning up of the wording in the *Handbook for Special Sworn Data Users* is needed.

- (2) **The Committee recommends the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey (FRIS) be continued as a Census follow-on survey into the foreseeable future.** (Tom Kimmell)

Action: Passed.

- (3) **The Committee recommends that annually there should be questions asked on a survey to determine what acres are being irrigated and changes in acres from the previous year. Data should also be collected by types of systems (surface, sprinkler, drip, micro, etc.) added or removed.** (Tom Kimmell)

Action: Withdrawn to be discussed with other environmental issues at the next meeting. The basic need is information on agriculture's use of water.

- (4) **The Committee recommends the Chair appoint an ad hoc committee to draft an agenda for discussion of environmental issues at the next meeting.** (Walt Armbruster)

Action: Passed. The following members are assigned to the committee: Hugh Warren, chair; Mark Whalon; Mark Jenner; Tom Kimmell; and Jack Mitenbuler. A NASS representative will also be assigned. NASS will prepare a short (two page) summary of environmental data series for the committee's use.

- (5) **The Committee recommends that NASS makes a commitment to invest its existing resources, to the extent possible, to collect agricultural census and survey data from Indian reservations. In addition, the NASS Advisory Committee strongly urges Secretary Glickman to provide additional funding to NASS for this effort.** (Kelvin Koong)

Action: Passed.

- (6) **The Committee recommends that NASS should seek authority for conducting mandatory surveys when prices for one segment in an industry are dependent upon the reporting of information from another segment.** (Kelvin Koong)

Action: Did not pass.

- (7) **The Committee recommends an ad hoc committee be appointed to address the whole area of data collection and mandatory reporting for NASS business surveys and report to the next meeting.** (Mark Whalon)

Action: Passed. The following members are assigned to the committee: Kelvin Koong, Topper Thorpe, Andy LaVigne, Lee Schrader, and Bob Epperson. A NASS representative will be assigned. Liaisons from ERS and the Office of the Chief Economist will be sought because of their efforts to study mandatory reporting. NASS (Rich Allen) will prepare a short (two page) summary itemizing NASS's business surveys for the committee's use.

- (8) **The Committee recommends that the Equipment Section of the 2002 Agricultural Census collect total value of all equipment and retain the three tractor breakouts, grain and bean combines, and cotton pickers and strippers from the 1997 Census, but eliminate trucks, mower conditioners, and pickup balers.** (Jim Rieck)

Action: Passed.

- (9) **The Committee specifically affirms its support of NASS policy for announcing all data sets coming out of the data lab and making the specific data sets available upon request as stated in the draft Policy and Standards Memorandum 7, Access to Unpublished Data.** (Mark Jenner)

Action: Passed.

- (10) **The Committee recommends that definitions and terms in items 1 and 2 of the Production Expenses Section of the 2002 Agricultural Census be expanded to include terms meaningful to organic producers.** (Mark Whalon)

Action: Passed.



## Appendix 1. Agenda

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE STATISTICS  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

**AGENDA**

April 25-26, 2000  
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Washington, D.C.  
14<sup>th</sup> & K Streets NW

**Tuesday, April 25**

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Discussion Leader</u>
8:00 a.m.	Call to Order and Introduction	Ashby Pamplin, Committee Chair
8:10 a.m.	Meeting Plans	Rich Allen, Associate Administrator and Committee Executive Director
8:15 a.m.	Welcome	I. Miley Gonzalez, Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics
8:30 a.m.	Introductory Remarks	Ron Bosecker, Administrator
8:45 a.m.	Overview of Census Procedures	Steve Wiyatt, Director of Census and Survey Division
9:15 a.m.	Overview of Census Content Review	Fred Vogel, Deputy Administrator For Programs and Products
9:45 a.m.	BREAK	
10:00 a.m.	Census of Agriculture Content	Ashby Pamplin
11:30 a.m.	LUNCH	
1:00 p.m.	Census of Agriculture Content	Ashby Pamplin
2:30 p.m.	BREAK	
2:45 p.m.	Census of Agriculture Content	Ashby Pamplin
3:30 p.m.	Public Questions and Comments	Ashby Pamplin
3:45 p.m.	American Indian Reservation Census Procedures	Carol House, Director of Research and Development Division
4:15 p.m.	New Committee Business	Ashby Pamplin
4:30 p.m.	ADJOURN	
5:30 p.m.	Reception (Cash Bar)	

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**Wednesday, April 26**

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Discussion Leader</u>
8:00 a.m.	Call to Order	Ashby Pamplin
8:05 a.m.	NASS Data Use Policy	Ron Bosecker
9:00 a.m.	Mandatory Business Reporting	Rich Allen
9:30 a.m.	BREAK	
9:45 a.m.	Public Questions and Comments	Ashby Pamplin
10:15 a.m.	Committee Recommendations	Ashby Pamplin
11:30 a.m.	ADJOURN	